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THE NATIONAL LIBRARY  
PROBLEM TO-DAY

BY

ERNEST CUSHING RICHARDSON

*Librarian of Princeton University*

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT REPRINTED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE  
OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, PORTLAND

JULY 4-7, 1905

THE A. L. A. PUBLISHING BOARD

10½ BEACON STREET, BOSTON, MASS.

1905

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ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT: THE NATIONAL LIBRARY PROBLEM  
TO-DAY

BY ERNEST CUSHING RICHARDSON, *Librarian of Princeton University*

THE St. Louis Conference last year was international in character; China and Japan, Mexico and South America, and half a score of European countries were represented, the libraries of many countries reported on and the progress and prospects of international co-operation discussed. The participants, the topics treated, and the breadth of treatment combined to make of this meeting the most truly cosmopolitan library conference ever held in America.

This year the Portland Conference has been treated by the program committee as national in its character, first, because having looked abroad last year we naturally turn again this year with peculiar vigor to home affairs; second, because a place of meeting on the Pacific Coast sets forth the fact that our Association is national indeed and not a local association with a national membership; and third, because apart even from the accident of opening our session on the 4th of July, the occasion of meeting, the Lewis and Clark Centennial, is one peculiarly inspiring to national sentiment. Great as was the expansion represented by the Louisiana Purchase, it does not typify the continental stretch of our national territory, nor fire the popular imagination with national pride as does the Lewis and Clark expedition. The former was a "purchase," wise, far sighted, involving astute international negotiation and decisive diplomatic action, but this other was an "expedition," breathing that spirit of adventure and patriotic endeavor which is liarily associated with the Northwest, it has become a sort of symbol of possible national growth.

national in its extent and national in its limitations, its program touching libraries from the Atlantic seaboard to the Philippine Islands, and its attendance representing all sections from Maine to the Hawaiian Islands.

In speaking of this conference as national it is not to be forgotten, however, that in the American Library Association two nations are joined together, Canada and the United States, but the national problems of the two constituent countries, where they are not identical, are so parallel that any broad consideration of the national library problem as it exists to-day may venture to treat of the problems of the two nations as one. Canada and the United States are alike in their remoteness from the great European libraries, alike in stretching from Atlantic to the Pacific, alike in the long distances between the various centers of population, alike in the progressive extension from a long settled east to a relatively young and pioneer west, and finally, alike in that fundamental problem of the assimilation and education of a vast foreign immigration which it is the privilege of the library to help solve.

It is hardly necessary to say after this introduction that by the national library problem is not meant the problem of the national library. The national and state libraries have, to be sure, a certain right of pre-eminence in a national library conference, but both of these matters will be treated at other sessions—the national library by the Librarian of Congress himself. The national library problem as here meant is the library problem of the nation at the present day, and considering this theme we shall briefly

consider a single aspect each of the problem of the reference library, the problem of the popular library, and the problem of the A. L. A. with reference to these.

The library problem in whatever locality is always a double one; on the one hand there is the library in its aid to the search for new ideas, on the other the library helping in the diffusion of common knowledge; on the one hand the scientific reference library, and on the other the popular circulating library. The problem of the one is to furnish to the men who are advancing knowledge, whether in science or medicine, theology or trade, all the books that will help them in their task; and of the other, to tempt the multitude to read readable books.

In considering our national problem at this time it was the intention of this conference and it is the intention of this introductory paper to lay first stress on the work of the libraries and the library association in the promotion of that common knowledge which is necessary to make men good citizens, the library as a factor in popular education. This very fact, however, calls for some attention at this time to the scientific side, and the propriety of this has been emphasized by a request from the college libraries of the Pacific Coast to have their needs kept in mind at this conference. Let us consider, therefore, for a little the national library problem of the reference library at the present time, and this concerns:

*The adequacy of American libraries as regards their books.*

When President Gilman was preparing plans for the Carnegie Institution at Washington he expressed the opinion that the problem of American scholarship so far as books and libraries were concerned was pretty well settled. We are now so well provided with books, he said, that in one library or another we can get about everything that we need and we can now afford to turn our attention to other matters. This was so contrary to the experience of many librarians and scholars, and yet so precisely expressed the attitude of many institutions at the present day, that it provoked a more systematic observation on several lines, as to what the

actual resources of our American libraries are.

This inquiry conveniently divided itself into a study of our total resources and of their distribution over this wide land of ours. And first let us guard ourselves by saying that it would be misleading to imply that the total resources of this country in the matter of books were insignificant. On the contrary, the remarkable growth of actual resources of the country through such libraries as those of Harvard University, the Library of Congress, the Boston and New York public libraries, the John Crerar and the Newberry libraries, and many other college, reference and special libraries, is a matter of just pride, but whether these are adequate is another matter.

Being in position to examine a list of some seventeen hundred periodicals current about the year 1900, and to which actual bibliographical references in a certain line of work had been gathered, I have taken occasion to study these with reference to this subject.

The list is not a miscellaneous one, but is one of actual references gathered which the user is trying to verify by referring to the periodicals themselves. There are, as most of you know, joint lists of the periodicals in the libraries of Boston and vicinity, including Harvard, of Chicago and vicinity, of Washington and of California, all up to date of 1900 or later. Moreover, there is an older list of periodicals, but not of transactions, in New York, and besides this joint lists of many important classes in New York up to recent dates published in the *Bulletin* of the New York Public Library. Checking up in these various sources and comparing with the Astor Library catalog as well, some interesting results appear. These are, of course, subject to such corrections and liable to such error as such statistics must be, but in their general line they represent faithfully the real state of things as to the adequacy of our American libraries.

Eliminating the duplicate, doubtful, and those with incomplete comparative data, there remained a list of 1216 substantial series, perhaps 1-3 historical, 1-3 theological and philosophical, and the remainder scattered over the whole field, but chiefly in philology,

literature, political and economic science. 478 of these series cannot be found in any of the above sources. In other words 40% of these series, containing actual bibliographical references which an actual investigator is trying to verify, cannot be found by him readily anywhere in the United States.

It is true that a considerable number of these will perhaps be found in other libraries not included in these lists. 131 of the 478 series not to be found in any library, for example, relate to European history, and of these some will undoubtedly be found at Madison, Wis., and some probably at Cornell, the University of Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. But set over against this on the other hand the fact that a very large proportion of the total number consists of periodicals published in America and, on the basis of the figures of 478 out of 1216, not to be found in any of these libraries, it is a very conservative statement to say that of these definitely wanted books more than one-half of those published abroad are not to be found in any library of the United States.

If it is said that we have all of the more important works and those lacking are of secondary importance, it may be said in the first place that this is not true—an analysis of the series shows many of first importance—and, in the second place, if it were true, it would still be the fact that these books are only such as in someone's judgment had something of scholarly value in some line, the best things, in short, for persons working in that line. And of these tested books less than half can be found anywhere in the United States.

So much for the total adequacy of our American libraries. A word now as to the distribution of these resources. Here the condition of things is even more striking. It is a far call for a book from the Pacific Coast to Chicago or New York, and yet only 368 out of the 1216 sets are to be found in the California libraries. For 798 out of 1216 sets wanted, the Pacific Coast student must go to the Atlantic Coast, and there are 50 more, making a total of 858 in all which he cannot find nearer than Chicago.

On the other hand, there are less than half a dozen of these series which cannot be found

in the East and yet can be found on the Pacific Coast, though at Boston there are 20, at Chicago 50, at New York 65, and at Washington 27, which can be found in that locality only and nowhere else in the United States. There is thus, besides the 478 which cannot be found anywhere, a total of say 164 which can be found only at one point in the United States.

There is no doubt that our resources have grown greatly, but so long as it remains true that a California student must go 6000 miles for 45 per cent. of the works actually wanted on the subject, and 3,000 miles for 25 per cent. more, only finding 30 per cent. anywhere on the Pacific slope, the library resources of the country cannot be looked upon with complacency as adequate.

Moreover, among these 370 periodicals not to be found in the California libraries, but found somewhere in the East, there are no less than 40 of which there are six or more copies in the eastern libraries, and of which there is not one copy in the California libraries. The average among these 40 is 9, and among them there is one with 17, one with 15, one with 13, three with 12 and three with 11 copies, while the Pacific Coast is without a single copy. Chicago, for example, often has two or three or more copies of a periodical which is not to be found in California, while at the same time it lacks 114 periodicals which some one other locality east or west has, and 478 which no library in the United States seems to have.

These figures show that, splendid as is the progress of our great libraries in the supply of books, we lack at these points:

1. In our grand total we lack 40 to 67 per cent. of a minimum total of books needed and published abroad.

2. The distribution of our books is such that one locality may have a dozen copies of a volume, while another has none at all.

A remedy for this state of things does not lie in having each of the great libraries start up and buy these 478 periodicals now as fast as they have opportunity. This sort of thing we have been doing a great deal of and the net result is that only a small portion is gotten, for which we have paid much more than it was necessary, and which are distrib-

uted by accident, so that there may be several copies at one center and none in any of the others.

The remedy lies rather :

1st. In co-operation in purchase and distribution. By this is meant, not the actual pooling and buying by a single agent, but the distribution by agreement among the libraries, of the important works which shall be acquired by each, so that not more than one or two copies of the less used works shall be purchased in each locality. In many cases a single copy in the Library of Congress would be enough. It would be a comparatively small matter to distribute 500 or 1000 series among the libraries of any one locality in such a way that the burden of seeing that they were all accessible should not be very great. It is a simple, common sense matter of co-operation, which calls for only a little forethought and reasonable application of the principle of community of interest.

2d. Cheapening of the postal rates would be one of the very best means for relieving the acuteness of the problem of the scholar in the United States.

It is a matter of frequent observation to the student working abroad that the moderate postal charges, in Germany, for example, make it possible to get the books, which do not happen to be in a single center, at a moderate expense.

Our problem in the United States in this direction is such that a reducing of our postal rates would be of still greater use and would go far to help the student's serious problem.

3d. At the basis of either co-operative purchase, co-operative distribution, or the use by the student in one locality of books in another, by use of the mails, lies, of course, the co-operative list.

After 30 years' experience in libraries and a recent extensive experience of existing co-operative catalogs of periodicals in this country and abroad, I have no hesitation in saying that there is no point in library practice where capital and organization could be so profitably applied to an economical solution of our national library problem of an adequate book supply as in the immediate and considerable extension of the co-operative book list.

*Let us turn now to the second and more*

pressing half of our national problem—the public library in popular education,

*The public library as a maker of good citizens.*

I do not say that this second half of the problem is the greater one. The work of the inventor, the scholar and the poet, is as necessary to national progress as the elementary education of the average man. Without them, mediocrity rules, and a mediocre nation can never win in the struggle for existence among nations, for it is only educated directing genius, armed with the best that competing invention can furnish, that can win either in economic or in military struggle. A nation's very existence, therefore, depends on its science and its science largely on accumulated results recorded in books.

But the immediate problem of the library as concerned with elementary education is, in fact, the more pressing one, because it concerns not so much future progress and prolonged existence as it does our very existence itself at the present time.

The army of children reaching school age year after year and clamoring for education is enough in itself to make the problem pressing, but beyond this common and routine problem three of our chief problems to-day—the negroes, the Philippines and the immigrants—depend for their solution on popular education, by which we mean the education of every one without exception in certain fundamental ideas.

Without tangling ourselves too deeply in philosophy, we may note that there are two facts which lie very near the foundation of things :

1st. The fact that a man and his ideas are one and the same thing ;

2d. The fact that the unity of a nation or any society lies in the ideas which all its members hold in common, in the like-mindedness of its individuals.

The Sanskrit philosopher of three thousand years ago agrees with the modern psychologist when he says that, "We are our thoughts; we are made up out of our thoughts." In quantity, quality, form, character, a man is the sum total of his knowledge. The vital thing, therefore, about a man

is the sort of ideas that he holds; the vital thing about a nation is the set of ideas in which all its members agree.

Therefore it is that we may say without dogmatism that the solution of these problems lies in popular elementary education, and it is for this reason that the modern patriotic librarian takes up with special enthusiasm his part in the task of making good citizens of every resident of the nation.

The average library represented here today has of course little to do with negro or Philippine education, but there is hardly one which does not deal in some form with the problem of "Americans in the making," and the libraries of this Pacific slope have the hardest end of this problem, for they have to do with the assimilation of the most unlike, the Orientals.

Consider for a moment how the matter lies from this point of view: The thing which holds a nation together, we have said, is the body of common ideas. These common ideas are expressed in a constitution or a body of laws or in popular proverbs, common quotations, striking phrases, or else in a more general way, in the common law and in a national literature. Right or wrong, we in the United States have a body of ideas which may be called "American ideas," ideas held in common by practically all members in the nation, except the criminals and the cranks. Many, perhaps most of these ideas, are of English descent, though enriched from other nations. Some are held in common by all civilized nations, and some even by every member of every family or tribe on earth. We have gone on for some three hundred years, producing, shaping, and multiplying these ideas; sometimes fighting differences out with armies, but more often fighting them out on pulpit and platform and through the press or political parties. They are our ideas and a man to be an American indeed must have these ideas.

Now, it is not to be denied that many nations, even granted that they may have national virtues which far outshine many of ours, do differ from our ideas in many ways; for example, as to the proper standard of living for the working man, or this very need of elementary education for every man. There are nations which are foreign to the

very idea of fair play, sportsmanship and "a square deal," which are American ideas, though happily not unique to either the United States or Canada.

Some of the Oriental nations differ so far from us in their ideas that it is hard for them to understand us at all, or we them—still without saying whether the one or the other of us is the better. It is for this reason that we justly fear any immigration which will not or cannot understand, love, and practice American ideas.

Sometimes men get into such a panic about some nation or other or all nations that they lose faith in the power of American ideas to conquer and insist on wholesale exclusion of this or that nation at the cost of throwing to the winds some of our most loved American ideas of fair play, asylum and the freedom of the whole earth, at least for travel. We, however, who believe in American ideas and their irresistible power, and remember the multitudes who have come from many nations to enrich our nation, not only in wealth but in ideas and character, we welcome with keen pleasure all who are likely to learn these ideas and so become Americans in fact as well as in residence.

It may easily be that we must limit immigration to some extent and for the same reason that the attendance in city schools must sometimes be limited when it for a time outgrows the capacity of buildings or teaching force to handle. Yet the remedy for the schools is not permanent exclusion of children, but more school buildings and teachers, and the true remedy for overflowing immigration is more facility for education. With adequate facilities to make Americans of them, the more there are the better.

Turning now to consider how the library takes its part in the work of education, you have before you in the program of this conference many of the forms of activity that it is actually taking. I do not propose to retrace the ground that will be covered by these topics. In general terms, it may be said that in many parts of the country the free public library has come to be counted as much a necessary part of the means of public education as the public school. If things move as they are moving, it will not be long before every community in the United

States has its tax-supported public library, as a matter of course, exactly as it has its public school. If you are interested in this general aspect of the matter, follow in our program the work of the state commissions for the promotion of public libraries and their remarkable activities in the founding of new libraries, in the use of travelling libraries, and in developing the efficiency of existing libraries. Follow, too, the work of the library schools and library associations, whose number and activity are among the most significant signs of the times. Some special attention is given, you will note, on this program, to general conditions on the Pacific Coast.

The particular ways in which the public library takes its part in popular education are many, but these may be broadly classified into work with children during the school age and work with adults. The work with children includes first, co-operation with the schools in the many fruitful ways which have been brought out in papers and discussions of this association at its various conferences, and second, the special work with children out of school hours, the growing appreciation of which has resulted in the establishing of so many libraries for children, and the special school for the training of children's librarians conducted at Pittsburgh.

The importance of this work with children is very great. The work is done with children at the time when they are most responsive to ideas, and it will be hard to find in the sociological work of the present day any more inspiring reading than the reports of the work of the children's libraries as they are conducted in Pittsburgh and in all our important library centers at the present time. In view of the fact that in the work of assimilating the foreign immigration, we can never hope to make great progress with the adult, but must of necessity rely on beginning work with the children, the importance of this work in our national problem of Americanizing our immigrants can hardly be overestimated.

But the work of the children is by no means the only contribution of the public library to popular education. Some consider it, even the lesser part, for the reason that *the public library takes up the task at the*

point where the school lays it down, and continues it for the rest of a person's lifetime. It may work on less tractable material, but it works six times as long. The library is, as is often said in these days, the college of the community. It is the one public instrument of advanced education. The better understanding of this fact is leading to a general expansion of library activity in the direction of what is known as library extension, and the library is becoming the natural center of all the educational activity in the community for those out of school; lectures, debating and literary clubs—everything, in short, relating to popular secular education. More direct attention to this aspect of affairs was given at St. Louis than is given here, but the matter is implied in most of the discussions of the practical work of the library in the community.

#### *The A. L. A. permanent headquarters*

In conclusion and briefly, a word as to that problem of the American Library Association, which is most national in its aspect at the present time and most important for its work in helping the national work—the problem of a national headquarters, and a permanent executive organization. The able report of the committee on a permanent headquarters made last year outlines the varied interests which are rapidly making such a headquarters a necessity. I do not propose to review these grounds at this time. If you are unconvinced, read the report, and you will find a sober statement of acknowledged functions, which is sure to appeal to some generous giver who is on the watch to fill needs which are definite, concrete, and of acknowledged public utility. All that I wish to do at this point is to suggest that such a headquarters would immensely aid the A. L. A. in its rapidly multiplying activities.

To be brief and concrete, I suggest three matters only as types of what the headquarters would facilitate: First, on the side of the popular library there has sprung up a great demand for literature helping the library commissions in the establishing of libraries and the small libraries themselves in the choice of books—this latter being one of the most important of all factors in the final success of the free public library. The Publishing Board, thanks to Mr. Car-